

Senator Sarah Steelman

End-of-Session Report

District 16 - June 2004



Stronger Sunshine Law, Safer Hospitals, Marriage Protection Act Approved By General Assembly During 2004 Legislative Session

Dear Friends,

Another legislative session has come to a close. It is a great honor and privilege for me to have the opportunity to represent the 16th Senatorial district. The common-sense values of the people who live in this district help guide me as I serve the people of this state. I have never been one of those legislators who view how many bills we pass as a "successful session". It is not the quantity but the quality of legislation that matters and, in fact, the more bills we pass the more freedom we take away from the people.

The principles that guide me as I represent you are still the same as the day I was elected. I believe in putting people first. Our state government must live within our means and that "means" is you the taxpayer. Taxpayers already pay too much in taxes particularly when you add federal, state, local and payroll taxes together. State government should not be an obstacle or a burden to you but offer assistance and provide services – a quality education; safe highways; a fair civil and criminal justice system; and a safety net for those most vulnerable in our society.

This newsletter provides you with a brief summary of the most important bills that were passed this session as well as some that did not pass. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you need assistance or have suggestions to improve or change your government. Again, thank you for the opportunity to serve you in the state Senate.

*Your friend,
Sarah*

Constitutional Amendment Will Protect Marriage In Missouri

This session, I introduced and was able to win approval for the Marriage Protection Act, which will allow voters themselves to constitutionally define marriage as a union between one man and one woman.

Voters will consider this as an amendment to our state constitution. Several years ago, we enacted a statute defining marriage as a union only between one man and one woman.

However, a similar statute in Massachusetts -- which does not have a constitutional definition of marriage -- was struck down by that state's supreme court. Now, judges in that state have been directed to perform same-sex marriages or to resign the bench.

Without constitutional protections, this dramatic change occurred at the dictate of the courts, not the citizens themselves.

To ensure that citizens have a voice in such matters in Missouri, and that judges cannot undermine the will of the

people, I proposed this amendment to our constitution. It gives voters themselves the final word on this important issue. This amendment would constitutionally recognize marriages only between a man and a woman.

Protecting the institution of marriage in our society should be above question. For thousands of years, marriage has been the cornerstone of a family, and families are the glue that holds our society together.

Same-sex marriage doesn't threaten individual marriages. It does, however, threaten the institution of marriage. If we allow marriage to be redefined, then where do we draw the line? This institution imposes on parents the responsibility of properly raising and caring for their own children. Marriage should be legally protected by our society.

Ultimately, it should be the citizens, not the courts, that decide this issue. My amendment gives citizens this important voice in our state.

The Public's Right To Know:

Steelman Wins Approval for Stronger Sunshine Law

The right of the people and the press to have access to public meetings and records is essential to the success of our system of government. After five years of working to strengthen the state's open meetings and records law, we approved SB 1020. The bill improves our state's sunshine law to ensure citizens have access to meetings and records of public officials.

This measure increases penalties and creates a second standard by which public officials can be charged for violating the open records law. Purposely violating the law can result in fines up to \$5,000. Knowingly violating the law, the lower standard, can result in fines of up to \$1,000.

The law also limits the costs that can be charged for public records, and it increases information that must be made available under the sunshine law. Colleges and universities are now clearly under the law. Salaries of officials, such as university chancellors, also must be disclosed.

The law also expands the sunshine law to cover electronic meetings, such as those involving e-mail or computer conferences, as well as public meetings conducted by telephone conferences.

While not all provisions of the law that was passed are as strong as those I initially proposed, this law will improve the access of all citizens to the meetings and actions of officials conducting public business.

Protecting Public Health:

Lawmakers Approve Hospital Infection Control Act of 2004

Every year in this country, over 90,000 people die from an infection acquired in a hospital. This year we took legislative action to reduce these infections by passing the Missouri Infection Control Act.

The purpose of this measure is to encourage hospitals to take appropriate actions to decrease the risk of infection, and to let the public know hospital rates of infection.

I sponsored SB 1279, which requires hospitals to track the incidence of infections acquired while at the hospital. It also requires the Department of Health to post the rates of

infection by each hospital on their website.

All suspected infection outbreaks must be reported to the Department. Additionally, hospitals must adopt evidence-based control policies, which are subject to review by the Department.

This measure enables infection control officers to require hospitals to terminate any practice or procedure that does not meet the standard of care for preventing infections. In addition, hospital infection surveillance measures must be adequate to detect all nosocomial, commonly known as "staph," infections. Any manager or supervisor of a hospital who restricts an employee from discussing an aspect of care with the Department shall be guilty of a Class A misdemeanor.

Facilities must also perform a root-cause analysis and report to the Department on all cases involving nosocomial infection that resulted in death or a major loss of function by any patient of the hospital.



State Sen. Sarah Steelman, joined by State Rep. Kevin Engler and Congressman Todd Akin, announces legislation to allow voters to define marriage as a union between a man and a woman.

For More Information

www.senate.state.mo.us

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2004

Legislative Summaries

Community Decency, SB 870 — Prohibits sexually explicit billboards within one mile of state highways.

Child Protection, HB 1055 — Increases criminal penalties for child pornography.

Kidnapping, HB 1487 — Expands and strengthens state kidnapping laws to include taking a child 14 or younger without parental consent.

DNA Profiling, SB 1000 — Establishes a DNA database to include samples from all convicted felons. The program will be funded by additional court costs.

Foster Care, HB 1453/SB 762 — Requires the Division of Family Services to maintain higher standards to preserve families and protect children in foster care.

Tax Credit Fraud, SB 1099 — Requires systematic organization of tax credits issued by the state, including detailed reporting to ensure they achieve their intended purpose.

Meth Eradication, SB 922 — Tightens standards for transporting anhydrous ammonia to prevent its use in the illegal manufacture of methamphetamine.

Identity Theft, HB 916 — Updates laws against stealing another's identity and creates the crime of trafficking in stolen identities.

Mandatory Insurance, HB 855 — Requires insurers to cover treatment for mental illness in the same manner as other medical services.

Mental Health for Children, SB 1003 — Establishes a comprehensive system of providing mental health services for children without parents having to relinquish custody of child.

Prescription Drugs for Senior Citizens, SB 1160 — Establishes a state repository for donations of sealed prescription drugs for older and disabled citizens.

Property Tax Relief, SB 730 — Allows senior citizens and citizens with disabilities to obtain a state income tax credit to offset property tax increases of 5 percent or more.

Tort Reform, HB 1268 — Curbs venue shopping, re-establishes limits on jury awards in civil cases for non-economic damages, prevents multiple awards for the same incident. VETOED BY GOVERNOR.

Unemployment Compensation, HB 1268 — Helps lower premiums paid by businesses by restoring solvency to the state's depleted unemployment compensation fund.

Mandatory Union Fees, HCR 5 — Blocked Gov. Holden's order to take fees from earnings of state workers refusing to join unions. VETOED BY GOVERNOR

Coping with the Loss of an Unborn Child:

Stelman gains passage of legislation to document stillbirths in Missouri

The stillbirth of a child is one of the most traumatic events a family can face. Each year, there are about 26,000 stillbirths in the United States — about five times the number of children lost to SIDs. Mothers of stillborn babies carry their babies for months and experience labor pains just the same as with a live birth. It is important to recognize these births of stillborn babies.

Until now, the tragedy of a stillborn child in Missouri was compounded by the state's failure to officially document or recognize the existence of the stillborn child.

This session, however, we approved SB 799, which I

sponsored, that will help families facing this tragedy and expand state records to include stillbirths.

This law will allow the mother or father of a stillborn child to request documentation of the birth. The measure also ensures that the mother has the right to decide the final disposition of the remains of the child.

This measure will help give comfort to families, and will provide our state with information needed to better understand, and hopefully gain information needed to move toward reducing stillbirths in the state of Missouri.

Missouri Honors Veterans Of Korean Conflict

Missouri this year began honoring Korean Conflict veterans with the Korean War Medallion, established under SB 219, which I sponsored and passed last year. This legislation entitles any Korean Conflict veteran — those serving between June 27, 1950 and January 31, 1955, to apply for the medallion recognizing them for their service to our country during this conflict.

In addition to veterans, the surviving spouses or eldest surviving child of deceased veterans of this engagement may also apply for the medallion honoring Korean War veterans.

The medallion programs are administered through the office of the Adjutant General of the Missouri National Guard. Citizens wanting more information may write to: Veterans Awards, P.O. Box 1808, 2302 Militia Drive, Jefferson City, MO, 65102, or call toll-free at 1-866-834-3431.



Sen. Steelman joins Ronald Stephen Miller, of Hollister, a Korean War veteran, designer and first recipient of a Korean War Veteran Medal authorized by legislation Steelman sponsored last year.

Lawmakers Refuse To Increase Taxes; Economic Recovery Funds Budget Increases for Schools, State Programs

Missouri lawmakers have held the line on more than \$750 million in tax hike requests from the governor, allowing competitive markets to grow the state economy, pulling it out of recession and providing funding needed to balance the state budget and provide additional funding for public schools and colleges in Missouri.

In all, lawmakers this year approved more than \$4.7 billion for public schools in Missouri. That is \$60 million more than the governor requested for public schools, and it was provided without increasing taxes.

Higher education also fared better this year,

receiving a total appropriation of \$1.049 billion, an increase of more than \$20 million over what was authorized last year.

The Department of Health and Senior Services, which provides an important range of programs for our state's older citizens, also enjoyed funding increases in a total appropriation of \$450 million.

Other state programs, including such basic necessities as assistance for senior citizens in nursing homes and law enforcement programs also received budget increases.

When You Need Help....Or to Contact Sen. Steelman

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